769 continuity is established between the living and the dead, with the deceased acting as intermediary. Religious customs, magic, and civil law, all are intermingled in apparent disorder, and the casual or inexperienced observer is all the more confused inasmuch as diverse accessory or circumstantial features mask the essentials in being more obvious. [164]

Does not the same sort of confusion confront a foreigner in France who sees the funeral of a prominent citizen? If he is uninformed, how is he to recognize the religious rites and civil requirements which form the common basis of all funeral ceremonies, for the great and for the humble, brought to their highest development for the one, reduced to their absolute minimum for the other.

764 Therefore, the important thing to show here is the substratum on which all funeral observances rest. For the sake of clarity, we shall divide the period of 40 days into four phases: (a) from death to burial; (b) burial; (c) the funeral celebration; (d) the period of mourning.

763 (a) From death to burial. As soon as death occurs, the fact is announced to everyone by appropriate means.

The lamentations of the women burst forth, and this spreads the news in the immediate vicinity, while gunshots inform the whole settlement. These acts have something of the ritual that was carried out when a Bambara died in war. Raffenel has given us a remarkable picture of it.

763 "When a Bambara died in battle, three gunshots, fired
152 near the door of his hut by one of his companions-at-arms, announced his death to the family. Wailings answered this announcement, and the weeping women of the village came out of all the huts to run to the house from where the signal had been heard. Everything was abandoned in order to share in this sorrow. First they wept, and then they ran to find out where the mourning was...

763 "The warrior charged with this mission arrived at the door at a gallop. He pulled up his horse, slowly loaded his gun, shot it, reloaded it again, then again... , and when the third shot had rung out, he rode off with equal speed, without uttering a word, without giving a single detail... Two shots announced enslavement."

763 A gunshot today most likely signals the death of a hunter or the father of a hunter. In any case, however, there are always cries and vociferations by [165] the women, who are joined by their friends, relatives, and neighbors.

Horsemen ride off to notify any of the sons of the deceased who are away.

[567] Meanwhile, the chief of the slaves, the major-domo, the confidential agent, or a friend or neighbor of the deceased goes to inform the chief and the principal men in the village.

764 These personages come to the mortuary house at once, spear in hand. After being received by the man temporarily in charge of the house, they go to the deceased to discover his identity and at the same time express their condolences to the family represented by the person who received them; then they withdraw.

In the mortuary hut silence descends while the women prepare the body. They wash it with warm water usually [824] scented with basil, su-ko-la (Ocimum album and febrifugum); they dry it and wrap it in pieces of native white cotton material or else dress it in its own garments, likewise white. A mat [285] of coarse straw (tyekala, kara) is placed in the middle of the room. A fine, flexible mat made of iphène leaves is put on top of it, and the women lay out the corpse on the second mat. Sometimes they place a grindstone on the abdomen to keep it from swelling.

When these preparations are completed, the women, [352 516] dressed in white native cloth, sit down in the native fashion on tiny stools in the mortuary hut. Those who come in from outside give evidence of terrible grief: they cry out, they weep, [152] they cover their heads with a bit of cloth and hurry toward the mortuary hut. As soon as they enter, they become quiet and stop weeping.

152 764 767 Among the Bambara grief is never silent; it is customary to show it overtly. As soon as there is a crowd, the singing begins, in rhythm to the clapping of hands. One person or another will be inspired to sing of the achievements and virtues of the deceased. Professional weepers and mourners mingle with the crowd, guiding and gradually encouraging the noisy display.

776 829 contact with the genii and know their family names, or diamou; however little they may be at ease with a Frenchman they will beg him to show them the place where a well should be dug, convinced that we know where live the spirits who are appointed to watch over water. Do we not bear them a certain resemblance?

776 The gnâ, or boli, also are sexed; they reproduce and found families. They are superior to the genii in power and wickedness, and, except indirectly, capable only of evil. They are at open war with God who, without taking away any of their intelligence or liberty, has condemned them tosuffer and to undergo the punishment of fire. They continually set up ambushes against the djiné to make their plans, good or evil, miscarry; they take pleasure in tormenting men, and the Bambara fears them greatly. The worship of the djiné is nothing compared to what is accorded them. Those considered most powerful have an entire retinue to serve them and to render them [651] honors and, as will be seen later, the head tax of 3.50 francs per head is nothing compared to the sums the Blacks spend to ward off the blows of the boli and avoid their wrath.

Like the djiné, the boli appears in human form, but it is disgusting and hideous to behold. All those upon whom the favor of an appearance is bestowed are frozen with terror; the body of the boli is terrifyingly black, and its face disappears in a flame above which rise horns.

[782 822] In the sacrifices to the boli the liturgical colors are black and red, and a white victim is never offered except in an indirect sacrifice necessitated by an offering called saraka, which is quite rare./33/

2. Sorcery and Priesthood

152 Surrounded by spirits, by genii always seeking to harm him, a Bambara is quick to believe that he is the victim of one. This attitude contributes more than a little to give him a certain endurance manifested in the face of suffering. I would even say that he usually bears suffering, not with stoicism but with the torpor of an animal.

152 After all, what can one do about an evil that cannot be exorcised except to bear it? What can one do against a powerful being that cannot be disarmed? Nevertheless, in the depth of his being he feels a need to enjoy himself (and enjoyment for him consists in drinking, eating, sleeping, and procreating); therefore he feels a horror of all suffering and neglects nothing that can protect him from it. In order 751/ to live in peace, he reddens everything a little with blood and covers 789 his body with grigris or good-luck charms, with talismans that change the course of things and even of nature, and lastly amulets which will forearm him against poison, help him avoid an accident, cause the sorcery of the malicious to miscarry, send away the gnâma of the genii, of the living and the dead, and prevent the unknown forces which are found more or less everywhere in nature from taking hold of the wearer. For this protection they address themselves to the priests of the djiné and the boli, and especially to the sorcerers who have close contacts with the genii and are the mediators between man and the entire invisible world.

776 Since the Bambara conceived the visible and invisible world as 782 similar to what he believes himself to be, he has come to believe quite naturally and without any effort that the genii can be seen and conversed with their language understood and, finally, that it is possible to subjugate the forces of nature and hold them in one's power. By making offerings and sacrifices or causing them to be made through the intermediary of a priest, he can win a spirit's favor and thus lessen his fears and terrors. But if the spirit is weak, they will be ready to withdraw their attentions; it must be equal to the one feared and if possible outdo it.

778 It is force, or, to use their term, fanga, that governs each 791 person's conduct toward his neighbor; to be obeyed, a man must first cause himself to be feared, and only a powerful man will succeed and see everything yield before him. /34/

The Negroes have seen people of low birth and poor family succeed in increasing their property and become rich to the point of where they have servants and slaves and dominate a whole village, a whole tribe, or a whole people. Since they like to reason from

Chapter 3

The Bambara's General Ideas on Human Life

1. Sickness

152 753 In his innermost being the Bambara feels an ever unassuaged thirst for happiness, an intense and pressing need to live for enjoyment; therefore he revolts against all suffering, both physical and mental. It seems unnatural to him, and at the least discomfort a person will state and believe that he is the victim of malice, of an enemy who is taking vengeance, and he immediately blames the world of invisible beings and those who have intimate relations with it.

753 Not only do the Bambara consider sickness unnatural, they consider it a more or less conscious force which comes to torture them. For fear of displeasing it or of displeasing the genie, the superior force which has taken it into its service and is using it as it pleases, they surround themselves with precautions against announcing the sickness of one of their people. When one asks a Negro for news of his health, his first answer will be that he is well, and if a member of his family is confined to his mat in agony, he will still tell you: "Toro si t'âla (1), he is suffering no pain."

1. Toro, "suffering"; si, "not any"; te, "is not"; â la, "on him" (la, "on").

755 The sick have unlimited confidence in their sorcerers, who are all doctors and apothecaries, and they submit blindly and without any argument to their orders and prescriptions. From them they receive herbs and leaves, and the infusions or brews made from these are prescribed as beverages or lotions, but most /45/ frequently the sorcerers rub their clients' bodies and gently stroke them, anoint them with oil and grease and spit on the affected part while reciting a formula. And always, of course, the number of grigris and talismans in the possession of the patient is increased by several items.